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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6687
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0600
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4131
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7690
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5249
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1132
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1032
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001025

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S MONKS: PRAYING FOR THE REGIME TO FALL

REF: RANGOON 1019

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: One of Burma's most senior monks told us the recent demonstrations of monks in Rangoon had grown from spontaneous outrage to the Pakkoku incident and in response to calls for a boycott broadcast on the Burmese language stations. Though he could not speak for all forty-seven of Burma's most senior monks, he claimed the fifteen monks he serves with on the clergy's Central Executive Committee share his opposition to the military regime along with almost all lay-monks. The advisor to the Minister of Religion had tried to establish a "disciplinary committee" of monks to take action against their colleagues, but had been rebuffed by the clergy's leaders. Monks continue to be detained, interrogated, and closely monitored. The situation will not return to normal for some time, he noted. The generals have no legitimacy among Burma's monks, who are praying for their downfall. End summary.

12. (C) On October 15, Embassy political assistant met with Bhandanta Than Wa Ya, a member of the Central Executive Committee that governs Burma's Buddhist clergy. The committee consists of forty-seven senior monks, divided into three groups that take turns serving as the clergy's active leadership. The committee is known as the State Sangha Maha Nakaya Committee. Bhandanta told us he could not meet with pol/econ chief, or any other foreigner, because of the strict surveillance he was under, but agreed to answer written questions carried to him by our Burmese political assistant.

13. (C) Bhandanta told us that the recent demonstrations led by monks in Rangoon had not been formally organized, but had grown from a spontaneous response to outrage at the Pakkoku incident, and in response to the calls for a boycott broadcast on the Burmese language stations listened to widely throughout Burma. Bhandanta said that almost all monks inside Burma, including himself, oppose the regime. He noted that, like all Burmese, the monks are watched closely and many are afraid to express their opposition to the regime openly for fear of the regime's harsh reprisals. Regarding

the views of the most senior clergy, Bhandanta said he does not know the leanings of all forty-seven, but the fifteen senior monks in his group shared his opposition to the military regime.

¶4. (C) Bhandanta said that on the third day of the monks' protest, the Central Committee was approached by Ant Maung, a retired director general from the Ministry of Religious Affairs who serves as the religious advisor to the Minister of Religion. Ant Maung attempted to obtain the Central Committee's agreement to establish a "disciplinary committee" of monks to take action against their demonstrating colleagues, the same way the regime uses its mass-member organization's (USDA) plain clothes thugs. The Committee rejected the idea after learning from a lay-monk in Shan State that Burma Army soldiers were shaving their heads and heading to Rangoon to disguise themselves as Monks to crack down on the demonstrators.

¶5. (C) Since the Central Committee had come under criticism for its silence, Bhandanta said he drafted a statement calling for a dialogue between the regime and the opposition, and for all sides to avoid extreme stands and views. Bhandanta said the Chairman of the Committee, the Senior Monk of Magwe Division, had agreed to the statement, as well as the Minister of Religion, when Ant Maung began organizing less sympathetic monks to oppose it. The language calling for dialogue was eventually dropped from the statement and the Senior Monk was pressured to include language reminding monks they were prohibited from participating in secular affairs and reminding them of "Directive No. 65," a harsh edict from the Ne Win era giving permission to the Ministry of Home Affairs to take action against monks "in proportion to their sins."

¶6. (C) Bhandanta did not know how many monks were currently
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being held, although he was aware of ninety monks, including the head monk of the brutally raided Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery, being detained at a monastery in the Kaba Aye monastery complex. Bhandanta had heard the monks were undergoing interrogation and those whom the authorities considered suspect at the end of their questioning were being moved to Insein Prison and the Government Technical Institute (GTI) for further interrogation and detention. Bhandanta did not know how many monks had been killed during or since the recent protests.

¶7. (C) Bhandanta said Rangoon's monasteries were empty because so many monks had been detained or fled. He had no knowledge of orders from the authorities to send novices home from monasteries, but noted that many novices had departed in anticipation of being arrested and others had been fetched by worried parents. Bhandanta explained that monasteries which had been more involved in the demonstrations were being watched closer than others, and that visitors to his monastery were being required to sign a "guest registration book." (Bhandanta personally escorted our political assistant in and out of the monastery so he did not need to sign the book). He could not say when the monasteries would return to normal but predicted that the life of Rangoon's monks would be disrupted for some time.

¶8. (C) Bhandanta emphasized that the regime sees anyone who opposes them as the enemy, and have now turned their attention to the monks. Asked if the regime maintained any legitimacy with the clergy after their brutal attacks, Bhandanta replied that the clergy regarded the regime as illegitimate even before the demonstrations began. "We are praying the SPDC goes, the sooner the better."

¶9. (C) Comment: Communication for foreigners with Burma's top clergy is rare. They lead a separate existence and consider themselves above the worldly fray of politics. Even before the recent political unrest, Buddhist clergy regularly

declined requests to meet with us. That they have entered Burma's political scene so publicly, and are willing to frankly communicate their views, is a comment on the clergy's grave concern for Burma's future and their distaste for the ruling generals. End comment.

VILLAROSA